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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY CONSOLIDATION SPEEDS UP, LIBERALS
SPLIT ON NEXT STEPS

REF: A. MOSCOW 2550
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 2798

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice Wells for Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Consolidation of political parties has accelerated with reports that the Agrarian Party will merge with United Russia and that the Party of Social Justice (PSS) and the ecological Zelenye ("Green") Party will merge with Just Russia. Agrarian and PSS leadership claimed ideological affiliation with their prospective partners, while the Greens conceded that their motives are financial, with a final decision on whether and with whom to merge coming after October regional elections. Liberal democratic parties Union of Right Forces (SPS) and Yabloko are pressing for a new united opposition party, while others such as Garry Kasparov and People's National Democratic Union (RNDS) leader Mikhail Kasyanov prefer a coalition. Absorption of the Agrarians, Greens, and PSS likely will affect only regional politics, since they hold no Duma seats and lack nationwide support. Continued disunity among liberal democratic parties suggests that their prospects remain dim. End Summary.

Agrarians and PSS Absorbed By Duma Parties, Greens Unsure

[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 12, Agrarian Party leaders released a statement urging its members to merge with United Russia. The statement described past cooperation between the parties, emphasizing that "we fought together" for the agro-industrial complex and that they jointly created laws to protect domestic producers. Agrarian Party leaders argued that their interests will strengthen by joining a Duma party, adding that a smaller number of parties makes the electoral system "more comprehensible to voters" (see ref B). Congresses of United Russia (on November 20) and the Agrarian Party (on December 10) will vote to finalize the merger.

[1](#)3. (C) On September 16, Just Russia announced that it soon will absorb the Party of Social Justice (PSS) and that talks "will be intensified" to absorb Russia's only ecological political party, Zelenye ("Green"). PSS leader Alexey Podberezkin told media on September 16 that a PSS congress on September 25 will finalize the merger, which he confirmed had already received approval from PSS regional offices. The Greens' Deputy Chairman Aleksandr Belozarov lamented to us in a September 18 meeting that his party "would prefer to remain independent because our priorities are different." However, Belozarov explained, merging with Just Russia would provide financial and administrative support at a time when the Greens desperately lack resources. Belozarov boasted that United Russia also has been courting the Greens for a merger, adding that in some regions (Rostov, Khabarovsk, Tomsk, and Zabaykalskiy) the Greens had signed cooperation agreements with United Russia. After the October 12 elections, Belozarov concluded, the Greens will decide whether and with whom to merge. (Note: Of the five regions that will hold

October 12 elections, the Greens will only appear on the ballot in Irkutsk.)

Democratic Parties Contemplate a New Party...

¶4. (SBU) Russia's "liberal" democratic parties continue to negotiate consolidation but disagree whether it will be as a new party or as a coalition. Speculation has swirled since the August 19 joint statement issued by Mikhail Kasyanov (RNDS), Nikita Belykh (Union of Right Forces, or SPS), and Vladimir Ryzhkov (Republican Party) (see ref A). In a September 15 media interview, SPS's Belykh stated that a new united party on the basis of SPS "seems quite realistic to me today." He added that if ongoing negotiations were successful, he hoped to issue "relevant statements within the next month."

¶5. (SBU) Yabloko, which abstained from the August 19 statement, continues to press for a role in a united democratic program. Party leader Sergey Mitrokhin revealed in a September 15 press interview that "we are holding consultations with everybody, including SPS" and that "before the next election we will create a serious rejuvenated and strong union of democratic forces, perhaps even as a party." However, Mitrokhin continued to question how best to unite the democratic parties. "The democrats should acknowledge their responsibility for the defeat of democracy in Russia," he noted, echoing his reason for not signing the August 19 statement.

...Or Just a Coalition

¶6. (SBU) RNDS leader and former PM Mikhail Kasyanov told the press on September 15 that he supported the idea of a coalition but not necessarily that of a new party, adding that "no merger, no creation of a single party is required at this stage." Rather, Kasyanov called for a joint statement to be signed by a democratic coalition comprising RNDS, SPS, Yabloko, Garry Kasparov's United Civil Front (OGF), and the Republican Party. In a September 15 media interview, Kasparov agreed with Kasyanov that a new party is not the best way forward. Instead, Kasparov favored "a new movement to bring together opposition democratic forces" since he believes that the government would not register a new party, and if it did then it would not allow such a party to contest elections. (Note: Democratic opposition parties attempted to register in the five regions for the October 12 elections, but none were successful. End note.) Kommersant reported September 15 that a congress of democratic forces will be held December 13.

¶7. (C) Comment: The rapid consolidation of parties into larger but less ideologically cohesive alliances marks less a moderation by the gaining Duma parties than an acknowledgment of defeat by the non-Duma parties. On ideological grounds, the Agrarian Party align more closely with the Communists than with United Russia, but they have more to gain from joining a party with larger Duma representation. The Greens openly acknowledged their merger as a financial, ideologically agnostic necessity, and their ultimate decision may hinge on which Duma party makes the best offer. From a practical standpoint, the absorption of these niche parties will affect regional more than federal politics since their appeal is too diluted at the national level. Meanwhile, the liberal parties' continued disunity on the merits of a party versus a coalition portend a long winter for democratic opposition in Russia.

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